

LARRY THE COLLEAGUE AND MENTOR

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I arrived at Cornell in January of 1978 as a nutritionist with a recent background from the University of Maine in teaching and research. I filled a position recently vacated by Dr. Carl Coppock with the main responsibilities of extension and research, with an emphasis on extension - a difficult pair of shoes to fill. The job was to work with the county agents, the producers and the industry who met the needs of the producers in the State. My area of expertise was amino acid nutrition and energy metabolism and not much else. Here is when I started to eat humble pie: oh, by the way, in 1960 to 1965 I spent 3 years as a 4-H county agent in Columbia County and 2 years working for GLF and Agway!!

I remember well Larry taking me with him to visit a farm North of Watertown, shortly after I arrived. The farmer had been told when he called the county extension office that to solve his problem just reduce the amount of milk they were producing. They wrote that source off and then spent money on several other "experts" before turning to Larry. The problem was that when the cows calved, they went down. Well, given my background, I was muttering about protein; Larry looked at the mineral side which I did not have a clue about. Larry figured out the problem - the dry cow ration was lacking in Mg! What we were looking at was high K rations coupled with low Mg - classic downer cow syndrome! In their eyes, Larry walked on water! I had to agree. I hate to think the amount of money they spent and the cows they lost before this problem was resolved. That was the beginning of eating humble pie and my education! There were many other examples like that through the 11 years that I spent at Cornell; ones that I will never forget and have put in my tool chest to use in the rest of my career.

Larry felt strongly about working with agents and the industry. He thought it was important to put into the written word what we talked about. We, of course, did a lot of meetings in the State and I do not think there was a meeting that we participated in that we did not write a paper or article for. This turned out to be one of the most important things we could have done; it gave County agents, feed industry and producers the opportunity to follow up with questions if they did not understand something or to challenge us if they did not agree with us.

I remember well a time in my later years at Cornell, a participant at one of our many meetings saying, "Well Charlie, I have been listening to you for the last 10 years and I think I am finally beginning to understand what you are saying!" In contrast, Larry could take some complicated concepts and put them in a way that was very understandable by the audience. He knew the audience and could put the information at a level that was understandable. I learned the importance of doing this from him although not as well as I should have!

In the early days Larry and I were able to do research at the T&R Center without cost to us; it was great! This for both of us was a wonderful opportunity to take challenges from the field either that we had observed or our industry had presented to us. We had the flexibility of being able to do studies in the freestall barn or in the conventional facilities. This made a lot of our research efforts in those years dynamic and relevant to the industry we were serving.

On a humorous note, Larry convinced Paul Sirois, at the predecessor to the current Dairy One, to do the soluble protein assay. As a result of this, quite a bit of data began to be generated which we were monitoring. I remember clearly walking into Larry's office one day, right across from mine on the first floor of Morrison, to ask him what guidelines did he think we needed to give people in the field for the soluble protein in lactating rations. Larry put the proverbial research finger in the air and said I think it should be between 28 and 35% CP. We gave this as the guideline in the field and so it is to this day. Where was the research? We had only field experience to go on; there were not any controlled research studies. More seriously, this is just one example of many of the central concepts that Larry had of the importance of relating what was occurring in the field to either the research we were doing, others were doing or the recommendations that we were making.

Many things in those days took on an extra relevance because as we became more sophisticated in our ration formulation, with the use of the TI 59, which was an amazing calculator at the time (still have it – looked at as I am writing this article!), we started the concept of formulating rations using the programs that Larry developed on the TI 59 based on the NRC. We became more sophisticated with the introduction of “laptop” computers (we needed a crane to carry them!) with the development of a nutrition program, again based on NRC with Larry's modifications. We really did not have any money to do this. George Allen, Allenwaite Farms, Easton, NY, saw the opportunities and bought for us a Radio Shack computer with which we were able to refine the platform so that it was useable in the field. This was successfully accomplished. There was a deal however – the computer which George purchased, he wanted back with the program on it! We brought it back to the farm and with this program in hand, he told us that he was able to get a return on his investment within a week or so, and then some. Luckily by this time, because of this success, Larry was able to convince the department to invest additional monies to get additional computer power. This allowed us to move ahead with additional improvements over time. This initial effort, without going into any more detail, maintained the central concept of nutrition platforms being useable in the field which has impacted the development of the CNCPS model to this day and has influenced the platforms that have incorporated the model through its many changes since the mid 80's.

One of the important events of the year were the Feed Dealers meetings. This always occurred after CNC. The concept that was developed by Larry, and maybe Carl Coppock as well, was to take some of the latest thinking that was presented at the CNC as well as the relevant research published in the last year and present this information

to the feed industry in the state. Larry and I held meetings in 5 to 6 locations across the state. We put together a proceeding for these meetings. These meetings were focused on the field nutritionists representing the different feed companies in the state. Most of these nutritionists did not attend CNC so this approach was a conduit to provide some of the latest thinking in areas that were relevant to what they did on a daily basis in the field. This week was very intense and not only allowed us connect with the industry to learn about their challenges and ideas but also it was a week where Larry and I spent a lot of “windshield” time to not only discuss what we had heard at the previous meeting, but also to discuss about what we were trying to accomplish in our outreach programs and the research that needed to be done. Admittedly the research side became more difficult in later years because of cow day charges, forcing us to have to go outside to get funding, which limited our ability to do research relative to the needs of New York dairy industry. This approach formed the basis to develop the Winter Management meetings focused more on producers, which I will “blame” Larry for. We asked faculty in the department in the different disciplines to help present more than nutrition but also animal genetics, reproductive management, health management, etc. This was usually done over a 2 or 3 week interval in different areas in the state. We also reached out into New England as well. This allowed several of the faculty, primarily research and teaching, to interact with the producers as well as the industry that served the producers. This provided them time to reflect on the research they were doing as well as what they were teaching. It provided the Cornell and the field extension staff an opportunity to also interact with the faculty; this was a win-win for all involved.

A seminal moment occurred one day; I do not remember the day or the year. Larry said when we look at who the producer relies on for information; the veterinarian is one of the key people on that farm on almost a weekly basis. We need to start working with this group of professionals in a more intensive manner. With that a number of activities were started, including walking up the road to the Vet school and meeting frequently with the outreach group, putting on nutrition training sessions and making it a priority to do things like visit farms with the Cornell veterinarians to emphasizing with extension field staff and nutritionists in the industry the importance of the team approach on the farm. I think this challenged all of us to become more sensitive to the health/nutrition interactions and a greater awareness of the management of the environment that surrounds the cows on the farm. This went even further with the development of a collaborative effort with the University of Pennsylvania and Cornell Vet schools as well as Animal Science faculty to provide multi-day workshops, focusing on production medicine. This was very popular for several years.

Another humorous remembrance - Larry's office was either across from mine on the first floor or next to mine on the second floor in later years. I frequently needed an article or a paper that I could not find; I would walk next door and see if Larry had it. He had piles of papers and stuff everywhere. Invariably he would go to one of his many piles and reach into the pile and pull out the paper!! I am not sure if Larry, since I left in 1989, organized the materials on his tables and desk into file folders or not. If he did I bet he can't find anything now – will really be interesting when he truly vacates his office and brings everything home; Arlene will be muttering!!

In my time at Cornell, Larry was truly a mentor and a colleague. I learned a lot from Larry over the years, especially in the beginning years when I did not have a clue. Larry was a wonderful colleague and I think and hope that during my 11 years there, we built on the successes that Larry and Carl made and continued to make a difference for the dairy industry of New York, which was our central focus. I believe that the successes that we had were recognized outside of the New York borders. For me it was a totally exciting time in my career and my colleague and mentor, Dr. Larry Chase, was instrumental in that becoming a reality.